

**OPENING REMARKS BY DEPUTY SECRETARY CHUCK CONNER  
AGRICULTURAL OUTLOOK FORUM  
ARLINGTON, VA – FEBRUARY 16, 2006**

Good morning and welcome to the Agricultural Outlook Forum 2006.

I'm Deputy Secretary Chuck Conner and it's my pleasure to open this conference.

I want to extend a warm welcome to everyone here in Arlington, Virginia and those tuning into the webcast of these events.

We have with us this year more than 130 speakers and panelists from across the U.S. ... and from Australia, China, Europe and South America.

We also have a distinguished audience from U.S. agriculture and the food and fiber industry, universities, and international agriculture.

Perhaps more than any other year, producers will be active participants in this forum and address the changing face of agriculture.

Please join me in applauding the producers in the audience.

We're all here this week because we recognize that the Outlook Forum is more than an annual conference. It's an institution recognized worldwide for shedding light on driving forces shaping the farm economy.

It's an opportunity to bring together some of the most thoughtful minds in food and agriculture to discuss the issues affecting this great industry.

Chief Economist Keith Collins and Under Secretary J.B. Penn will lead off with a first assessment of agricultural, trade, and policy prospects for 2006.

With this year's theme, "Prospering in Rural America," we'll look comprehensively at economic development in our rural areas.

In his keynote address, Secretary Mike Johanns will consider the profile of today's rural economy. He'll look at the need to create economic opportunity that supports those who choose the rural quality of life.

The Secretary will discuss farm policy and the Administration's commitment to completing the Doha Round of the WTO negotiations this year.

Elaborating on that theme this morning is our guest speaker. We are privileged to have with us U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman.

Following these discussions, a Plenary Panel, here in the Arlington Ballroom, will take a broad view of rural America's new economic frontier.

In these two days, speakers will explore challenges to rural America.

They'll look at modern communications – internet and broadband -- and how they're shifting the competitive balance in some very basic ways. One session will project the outlook for the next generation of farmers ... a topic that was at the forefront of USDA's Farm Bill Forums last year.

And experts will discuss the opportunity for bioenergy and bioproducts ... one of the nation's major initiatives that offers the rural economy its biggest new market in history.

Concurrent sessions will address major issues facing agriculture in the areas of conservation, science, globalization and markets.

Tonight, former Congressman Cal Dooley – our dinner speaker – will present his perspective on “Markets for Rural Prosperity.”

Opening this Forum with the 2006 Economic and Trade Outlook are two individuals who are trusted advisers on complex and sensitive matters, from the economic implications of regulations to international trade.

They led our work to move the 2002 Farm Bill into the hands of farmers and we look to them as we prepare for the 2007 Farm Bill.

Heading the Office of the Chief Economist, Dr. Keith Collins is an anchor at USDA ... advising the Secretary on programs, policies, regulations and legislative proposals.

Among his responsibilities are commodity forecasts, global change analysis, and energy policy and new uses for agricultural products. He is also Chair of the Board of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation.

Heading our complex farm and foreign sectors is Under Secretary J.B. Penn.

He is a widely honored agricultural economist with extensive credentials ... notably senior staff economist for the President's Council of Economic Advisers, president of World Perspectives, and a senior official of Sparks Companies -- now Informa Economics.

Dr. Penn has been in the center of the WTO and other Free Trade Agreement negotiations. He attended the WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong where Ministers set the stage for intensifying the negotiations and moving toward a conclusion this year.

Dr. Penn also maintains a full agenda that includes a host of domestic policy matters.

Ladies and gentlemen, Keith Collins and J.B. Penn ...

It's now my privilege to introduce an individual I've had the pleasure of working with for close to a year. From the start, Secretary Mike Johanns made it clear that he's passionate about agriculture. He's lived that commitment by crossing the country in the past year, listening closely to what farmers, ranchers, and rural citizens have to say about farm bill policy.

He's visited with victims of the 2005 hurricane disasters and overseen USDA's massive relief efforts for producers and rural Americans.

Secretary Johanns has devoted much time, energy and travel to the principles of free and fair trade. He's traveled to London, Geneva, Hong Kong and Davos to help bring the WTO negotiations to a successful conclusion.

He's worked nonstop – and with much success – to reopen markets to American beef.

This is a man who's always looking forward... who values the place of science in trade, in food and agriculture ... who's championed renewable fuels and the promise of energy from agriculture from the time he was Governor of Nebraska ...

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns.